

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore 9922 Front St. (Hwy M-72) Empire, Michigan 49630-9797

December 13, 2006

D18 (GMP/WS) (SLBE)

Dear Friends:

Thank you for your comments on Newsletter #3 for the new General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/WS/EIS) for Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Your input and participation with National Park Service staff during this planning process has been extremely helpful in drafting a range of management zones and concepts for the new plan. We have made great progress so far and are on track for completion by late 2008. Through continued cooperation with all of our stakeholders, we will develop a new wilderness proposal and a General Management Plan that will fulfill the purpose of the Lakeshore as prescribed by Congress in our enabling legislation. The new GMP will help the National Park Service continue to preserve the Lakeshore in its natural setting and protect it from developments and uses which could destroy its scenic beauty and natural character, yet still provide a balanced range of visitor experiences and recreational opportunities, from drive-to beaches to solitary hikes.

The next major step in the planning process is to expand the alternative concepts into "preliminary alternatives" which will include various configurations of management zones and proposed wilderness within Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. To fully develop preliminary alternatives, the planning team has been reviewing approximately 200 public comments received in response to Newsletter #3, as well as analyzing information about the National Lakeshore's cultural resources, natural resources, visitor use, and facilities. Each management alternative will include: 1) a map that shows how management zones would be applied to each area of the park and which areas, if any, would be proposed for wilderness designation; and 2) accompanying text that elaborates on the visitor use opportunities and resource emphases for various areas of the National Lakeshore. These preliminary alternatives will be presented to the public during the spring of 2007 in Newsletter #4. Once again, you will be able to provide your comments in a variety of ways, including our website, emails, letters and public meetings to be held in early May 2007. We will provide the meeting details as early as possible, so that those who wish to comment in this fashion can make arrangements to attend. Also, in response to earlier public comments, these meetings will be held near the National Lakeshore in Benzie and Leelanau Counties, and perhaps Grand Traverse County as well.

The comments we receive on the preliminary alternatives will then be used to develop a "preferred alternative." The preferred alternative may turn out to be similar to one of the preliminary alternatives, or it may incorporate elements from several preliminary alternatives. The GMP alternatives that are ultimately carried forward into the draft GMP/WS/EIS document (Summer

2008) are referred to as the "draft alternatives" (no longer preliminary) and the draft document will then be followed by the final GMP/WS/EIS by the end of 2008.

Once again, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who has participated in the new GMP/WS/EIS planning process thus far. We look forward to your continued participation and cooperation throughout this important planning effort. We encourage you to visit the GMP link on our website at www.nps.gov/slbe for the latest information on the new plan. We will be posting the Summary of Comments from Newsletter #3 soon and updating the Frequently Asked Questions and other GMP/WS information periodically. We also plan to launch a GMP/WS/EIS web forum in early 2007. The web forum is an exciting new opportunity that will allow you to post GMP/WS/EIS related questions and comments for the entire public to view and comment upon. The planning team developed this experimental venue to maximize public involvement and to respond to people who wanted to know what others were saying about the GMP/WS/EIS. The web forum will be accessed through a link in the GMP section of the park's website. We remain committed to developing a new GMP and wilderness proposal that will ensure preservation and protection of the natural and cultural resources entrusted to our care in a way that provides ample and varied visitor experiences and recreational opportunities. We are hopeful that our efforts to ensure open communications and transparency throughout this process are helpful to you and as always, we value your thoughts and comments. For more information call (231) 326-5134.

Sincerely,

Dusty Shultz Superintendent

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